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VOLUNTEERS IN TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

SEMI-ANNUAL REPORT

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Submitted To:

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VITA's Information Resources departments continue to move toward the goals stated in our last semi-annual report: 1) the dissemination, much more widely than previously possible, of VITA's technical information resources to LDC information centers and development workers, and 2) the achievement of greater self-sufficiency through the development of commercial information services which can generate funds to help support VITA's work in LDCs.

### Automation

VITA views the automation of our information services as an essential foundation for achieving these goals. This has involved computerization of our bibliographic files, switching our computerized VITA Volunteer skillsbank from the service bureau (BRS) to our in-house microcomputer system, and microfilming VITA's document collection. These tasks are essentially complete. It is now possible for us to streamline our services, and our ability to transfer our information resources to more LDC information centers is strengthened (e.g., our entire library can be transferred easily and relatively inexpensively now that it is available on microfiche). We can also transfer modern information handling technologies and other computer applications to these centers as well as to other organizations.

Developing the integrated hardware system, adapting the software, and developing the special program applications required for our large data bases (i.e. 4,500 VITA Volunteer records and over 25,000 bibliographic records) were complex tasks. Adding to the complexity were the time consuming processes of converting from tape to our in-house hard disk and floppy disk systems those data bases (volunteer roster, case studies, and the ATI data bases-- ACCESS and EXCHANGE) previously maintained by and accessed through BRS and CDC, entry of our Documentation Center card files (25,000 units of bibliographic/abstract information), and the microfilming of some 18,000 documents.

VITA has indeed broken new ground in mounting these very large data bases on a microcomputer system. We have found no other organization which has set up a similar system of this size. Solving the many software, programming and hardware problems have tested our ingenuity, not to mention our patience as projected deadlines had to be extended. Our system is, however, essentially complete: the VITA Volunteer roster is in use daily, and within the next two to three weeks, the bibliographic files will be fully operational.

What has been developed and the experience we have gained in installing these systems at VITA have created valuable resources enabling us to provide unique assistance to information centers

in developing countries as well as to others anywhere who wish to utilize microcomputer technology for similar or other applications.

#### Information Resources Development Training Program

The final week of VITA's semi-annual training program draws to a close on October 21st, and we count this as one of our most interesting and useful training sessions. It may also indicate our growing ability to reach a significant number of LDC information centers. Sixteen people from 12 countries participated in our October session (see attached list of participants). As can be seen from the attached program schedule, our curriculum was expanded and now includes microcomputer basics--terminology and concepts, data base management and manipulation, automating an information service, practical experience with the computer, microfiche technology--its advantages and disadvantages, and other topics related to automated as well as manual information handling and services.

Of interest is the fact that the expenses of almost all of the trainees were borne by their own organizations or sponsors other than VITA. The expenses of five were paid entirely by UNESCO, including tuition for four of them; OPIC supported the U.S. expenses of two People's Republic of China participants (the Chinese government covered their air fares); USAID/Upper Volta and USAID/Ecuador sponsored their participants; CDI (Honduras) sponsored two; GTA (Panama), one; GATE (Germany), one; and VITA provided full expenses for the participant from Zambia and waived tuition charges for three of the trainees (from Germany, Nigeria and Honduras). We feel this is a healthy trend and one we hope will continue.

Because of the interest that has been expressed in VITA's newly automated systems and operations, we have developed a special one week course, "Microcomputers for Information Resources Management" which will be held in November and again in March. At present, we expect at least two trainees in our November program; one is on the staff of ICAITI, Guatemala, and the other comes from the Department of Information of SIIAT in El Salvador. Attached is the course schedule for this program.

#### Commercialization

We continue to work toward the commercialization of our information services on a modest scale. After identifying those services we felt VITA could perform immediately with our current expertise and resources, we engaged a firm to do a survey to test the likelihood of a market for these services. Although the study was not conducted in great depth nor breadth, it indicated that there is

a market for VITA's services. We are refining the services to be offered and are currently developing a promotional brochure so we may initiate the announcement and marketing of services.

### Evaluation

At the end of October, we shall initiate a large effort to evaluate our dissemination of technical information. Although we routinely try to evaluate our information dissemination services through by-mail evaluation questionnaires, we feel that on-site personal interviews of requesters yield fuller, more accurate information. Over 550 VITA Volunteers in 89 countries will be asked to interview VITA requesters living near them. Those willing to undertake this task will be provided with interviewing guides, along with information on the subject(s) and/or proposed project(s) for which each requester sought VITA's technical information and assistance. We anticipate that this project will help us gather much more useful information than we have obtained through our routine evaluation procedures. And our analysis of the responses the requesters give to the interviews should help us judge more fully the impact our information services have on those who have requested technical information from VITA.

### Low Earth Orbit Satellite

VITA's joint project with AMSAT to launch a low earth orbit satellite is progressing well, aided significantly by the approval from AID/PVC to re-program \$30,000 of the AID/VITA Cooperative Agreement funds. This has allowed us to provide initial salary and travel expenses for a technical coordinator of the project. Harold Price assumed the duties of the VITA/PACSAT Technical Manager on September 1, 1983.

Price is now coordinating the work of several American-Canadian design teams who are building the computer hardware which is being scheduled for testing in space on the Delta flight next spring. The spacecraft which will carry the PACSAT experimental equipment is being built by the University of Surrey in England and it appears that all will be in readiness by the time of the Delta launch. Although NASA has not yet given final approval for the launch of this spacecraft, it seems most likely that it will be forthcoming.

### Ongoing Activities

Over the past six months, we have had the benefit of the services of a record number of VITA Volunteers who have contributed to VITA's work in a variety of ways. In addition to their more traditional activities such as handling inquiries, reviewing documents for technical quality, etc., volunteers have participated in new initiatives.

The Inquiry Service and Documentation Center are coordinating a project to develop some 120 technical reports on those subjects in greatest demand by our requesters. Over 300 volunteers were contacted, and 94 have agreed to write and/or review these reports. To date, 14 have been received, and we expect the rest by the middle of November. We believe that these concise, current reports, written with developing country conditions in mind, will facilitate and streamline our responses to the large volume of rather general requests we receive. They should also enable us to concentrate more of our attention on these requesters engaged in serious projects and in need of ongoing information, research, and technical assistance. Anticipating that these reports will be of high quality, we feel they may also be useful to the potential customers of our commercial services and/or form the basis for a revised and up-dated version of VITA's best known and most popular publication, The Village Technology Handbook.

A collaborative effort between VITA and the Voice of America has involved 69 volunteers in the production of 28 scripts for a series entitled "Your Healthy Family." The 10-12 minute programs will be offered to local radio stations across Africa. VITA is being paid a modest fee by VOA for this effort.

Other volunteer activities during the past six months include:

- o Four panels were convened that utilized the expertise of 22 volunteers. Subjects covered were: food conservation, enterprise development (two meetings), and variable stroke windmill.
- o On site consultancies numbered 23 in 13 countries.
- o Consultant name referrals numbered 37, covering such wide-ranging subjects as mosquito-eating fish, perfume distillation, post harvest grain preservation, and energy use in Afghan refugee camps.

A total of 425 volunteers were actively involved with VITA between April and October of 1983, compared with 489 volunteers used during the previous 16 months.

The Inquiry Service responded to 1,585 requests during the past six months, a 36% increase over the number of requests received (1,163) during the same time period in 1982. VITA's presentations on the Voice of America are always followed by a surge of queries from listeners and these account for a part of the increase. Recently, staff member Ibrahima Diallo was interviewed by VOA for three broadcasts. Topics covered were "no-till farming" (in both English and French) and "reforestation". The attached statistics covering the past two quarters will highlight other aspects of the

requests VITA receives for technical information.

As a result of the experience and capacity VITA has gained through microfilming the Documentation Center collection, we were approached by the Council for International Urban Liaison to collaborate on a proposal submitted to the Aga Khan Foundation to develop "The Aga Kahn Microfiche Collection on Third World Urban Development."

It is proposed that VITA and the CIUL create a library consisting of 200 important documents in the field of urban development and some 20 technical reports introducing specific urban technologies. These documents would be placed on microfiche and would be accessible by both a manual and computerized index. It is proposed that the collection along with a microfiche reader be distributed freely to approximately 100 organizations needing these specialized materials.

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Enclosures: List of Participants--October, 1983 Training Program  
Training Program Schedule  
Microcomputers for Information Resources Management  
Training Program Schedule--November 28 to December  
2, 1983  
Requests for Technical Information--Reporting Period  
April thru June, 1983 (2nd Quarter) and July thru  
September, 1983 (3rd Quarter)